

(23-VP)

**Disability Awareness Month**

**VOTER PARTICIPATION GUIDE**

Voting is one of the most basic ways to participate in the political system. It's a simple two-step process: register and vote. You can vote for the office of the president every four years and for members of Congress every two years. Primary elections offer a way to participate in your local community's political system by choosing which candidates will represent each party in the general election.

While you might think one vote doesn't determine political decisions, each citizen's electoral participation holds equal power. Many electoral races are decided by the difference of a few votes, showing the significance of every vote cast. The 2000 presidential election was a prime example; in many states, Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore were split by only a few hundred or a few thousand votes. The official Florida vote was 2,912,790 for Bush and 2,912,253 for Gore – a 537-vote difference that decided the entire election. Iowa had a 4,144-vote margin, and Wisconsin voters were split by only 5,708 votes. The smallest difference was in New Mexico, where Gore defeated Bush by a mere 366 votes out of almost 600,000 cast. With numbers like this, is it clear that every single vote matters.

**The Statistics**

Overall, people with disabilities are 20 percent less likely to vote and 10 percent less likely to register to vote than people without disabilities.

Experts predicted a razor-thin margin in the 2000 presidential election, but only 51 percent of Americans voiced their preference by voting. And only 41 percent of people with disabilities voted.

These statistics do show improvement from the 1996 presidential election, when only 49 percent of adults and 31 percent of adults with disabilities voted. Overall, three million more people with disabilities voted in 2000 than voted in 1996.

The National Organization on Disability (N.O.D.) determined that if people with disabilities had voted at the same rate as people without disabilities in the 2000 presidential election, the election results would be dramatically different. Based on studies of how people with disabilities tended to vote in 2000, N.O.D. determined that Florida voters with disabilities would have tipped the state in Gore's favor – and decided the election. Gore would also have won a larger majority of the popular vote nationwide.

### **Voting Reform and Related Legislation**

One reason fewer people with disabilities vote is because of accessibility issues. After the 2000 election, the U.S. General Accounting Office released a study showing that 57 percent of polling places nationwide had problems conducting voting – including widespread problems with accessibility for people with disabilities. And in Indiana, a survey conducted by Count Us IN volunteers during the May 2002 primary showed widespread accessibility problems with parking, curb cuts, ballots and voting booths. Although jurisdictions are required to choose accessible polling places (or establish a special accessible polling site), many jurisdictions do not comply, choosing to rely on absentee voting for people with disabilities.

In Indiana, Gov. Frank O'Bannon and Secretary of State Sue Anne Gilroy responded to the 2000 presidential election by creating the Indiana Bipartisan Task Force on Election Integrity. The task force examined a variety of issues, including outdated voter registration rolls, accessibility issues, absentee voting and voting systems. In October 2001, it issued a variety of recommendations in its final report, with one specifically addressing accessibility for people with disabilities: "The task force recommends that standards for polling place accessibility and voting machines be updated and that such standards include not only technical specifications regarding the physical attributes of polling places but also guidelines that incorporate sensitivity to the needs of people with disabilities."

The current standards in Indiana, as referenced by the report, include:

- County executives must establish an accessible polling place in each precinct or establish a special polling place for people with disabilities and provide notice of its location.
- People with disabilities may vote using a traveling absentee board or mail-in absentee ballot. (In general, voting by absentee board is limited to people who are unable to leave their homes. This method is *required* if such a person is unable to personally mark a ballot or sign the secrecy envelope.)
- People with disabilities may designate a companion, or poll workers from each of the major parties, to assist them in the voting booth.

These are *guaranteed rights* in Indiana, not courtesies extended by the voting jurisdiction or by poll workers.

The Indiana Election Division *requests* that each voting precinct ensures polling locations are accessible for people with disabilities, as state law mandates. They ask that the following items be made available to voters at any site:

- magnifiers for voters with visual impairments
- tape to hold ballots in place for voters unable to hold them
- chairs for voters unable to stand for extended periods of time

The requirements and requests above are based on several laws that govern access to the electoral process, including:

- **Voting Rights Act of 1965** – a nationwide prohibition against voting practices and procedures that discriminate on the basis of race, color or membership in a language minority group. Discriminatory practices and procedures can include redistricting plans and at-large election systems, poll worker hiring and some voter registration procedures.
- **Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (VAA) of 1984** – calls for polling and voter registration locations to be accessible to citizens with

disabilities. The act also says if a location is not accessible, the voting site will be moved to a new location or a polling official will come to the home of a person who cannot access the polling site and register him or her to vote or take his or her ballot.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990** – ensures that alternative means of registration and voting are accepted ways to participate in an election. Title II of the ADA requires access to buildings existing as of 1992 and requires all programs and services to be readily accessible to people with disabilities.
- **National Voter Registration Act of 1995 (Motor Voting Law)** – requires any government offices that license motor vehicles or provide services using public monies to offer citizens the chance to register to vote. Because citizens with disabilities are often clients of government and private agencies that provide services using tax dollars, the Motor Voter Law is an important law to increase political participation by citizens with disabilities.

### **Count Us IN**

The Indiana Governor's Planning Council for People with Disabilities has launched Count Us IN for one reason: to ensure that citizens with disabilities are full participants in the electoral process in Indiana. Through Count Us IN, the Council has set forth the following goals:

- Increase the number of people with disabilities who register to vote.
- Increase the number of citizens with disabilities who vote.
- Ensure that polling places are accessible and ADA compliant.
- Increase the number of citizens with disabilities who work at polling places.
- Increase the number of people with disabilities who register to vote.
- Increase the number of citizens with disabilities who become involved in political parties and/or campaigns.

Count Us IN continually seeks volunteers for voter registration drives, polling place accessibility surveys and other projects. For more information or to volunteer, contact Julia Vaughn at (317) 234-2226 (voice) or CountUsIN@gpcpd.org (e-mail).

### **Voting Eligibility**

In the United States, all citizens benefit from a democratic form of government. But with the freedom to participate in government comes the responsibility to be involved. You can impact our political process in several ways, but most importantly by registering to vote and voting in primary and general elections. You are eligible to participate in the 2003 primary and general elections if:

- You are a citizen of the United States.
- You are at least 18 years old on or before Nov. 4, 2003. If you are not 18 years old by the date of the primary, but turn 18 by Nov. 4, you may vote in the primary election to nominate general election candidates. However, you may not vote for candidates elected at the primary or on issues decided at the primary election.
- You reside in the Indiana precinct where you will vote for at least 29 days before the election.
- You are not currently in prison after being convicted of a crime.
- You register to vote at least 29 days before the election and your application is approved.

### **Voter Registration**

#### *Deadlines*

The deadline to register to vote in the 2003 primary election, which takes place May 6, is April 7. The deadline for the general election, which takes place Nov. 4, is Oct. 6. If you are unsure of whether you are registered, or whether your application to register was approved, contact the county voter registration office in your county of residence.

#### *How to register to vote*

To register to vote in Indiana, you must complete a voter registration application. You must provide your name, residential address, birth date and signature (indicating that

you meet the voter registration requirements). You will also be asked for optional information, including your phone number and an identification number, such as your driver's license number or the last four digits of your Social Security number. You are not required to disclose this information.

#### *How to update your registration*

To vote, your registration must be up to date. If you change addresses, you must update your registration with the county election office. If you move, fill out a mail-in voter registration application and return it to your county voter registration office of the Indiana Election Division before the registration deadline. Include your old registration address on your voter registration application.

#### *Where to register*

You may register in person at your county voter registration office. (In many counties, this is also your county circuit court clerk's office.) You may also register to vote while applying for or renewing your driver's license or updating your address. Your local public assistance, disability or unemployment compensation office also should make voter registration available to you if you apply for or renew services or change your address. The law says that *any* government agency or private group that uses state funds and whose primary mission is to serve people with disabilities is obligated to offer voter registration to its clients.

A voter registration form and assistance in completing it is available at the following sites. The agency will return the form to the appropriate county voter registration office for processing.

- Voter registration office (located in the county courthouse or offices)
- Bureau of Motor Vehicles license branch
- Public assistance offices, including the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) – Women Infant and Children (WIC), and Family and Social Service Administration (FSSA) – Division of Family and Children (DFC)
- Disability offices, including Indiana Area Agencies on Aging and the FSSA – Division of Disability, Aging and Rehabilitative Services

- Armed Forces recruitment offices
- Board of Registration offices
- Workforce development offices offering unemployment compensation
- Offices coordinating any government-funded service or program, including disability-related programs such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- City clerk, clerk-treasurer or town clerk-treasurer offices
- Public and county contractual libraries
- Township trustee offices
- Public educational institutions such as school corporations, high schools, colleges and universities
- County extension educator offices
- Indiana Election Division

You may download a form from the Secretary of State's Web site at [www.indiana.gov/sos/elections/forms](http://www.indiana.gov/sos/elections/forms), print the form, and mail or take it to one of the agencies listed above.

### **Preparing to Vote**

Election boards and other groups often publish sample ballots before the election, so you can plan how you will vote head of time.

Local newspapers usually publish notices of changes in polling places, and the establishment of a special accessible polling place known as a special voting poll, if necessary. There were numerous precinct changes for the 2002 election, so it is possible your polling place has changed since the last time you voted.

Political parties and non-partisan groups, such as the League of Women Voters, provide information on candidates and issues. Often, a group will hold a candidate forum to allow the public to hear the candidates talk about the issues and ask them questions.

### **Voting Assistance**

If you need assistance in voting, you may choose someone to help you as outlined below. No one who assists you may disclose any information about how you

voted, nor should he or she make any comment about your choices as a voter. Poll workers may provide assistance at your request. Following are the instructions from the “Indiana Precinct Election Handbook” that poll workers must follow when providing assistance.

A voter may be assisted in the voting booth if he or she has a disability (permanent or temporary) or is unable to read or write the English language, *and* the voter, *before entering the voting booth*, requests assistance.

The following may assist a voter:

1. The voter may designate anyone to assist himself or herself. However, a voter *may not* designate his or her employer, an officer of his or her union, or an employer or union representative.
2. Both judges must accompany the voter into the voting booth to assist the voter is he or she does not designate someone else to assist.
3. A person providing assistance to a voter must complete the “Affidavit of Voter Assistance at the Polls” *before* entering the voting booth to assist the voter.

Precinct election officers *may not* leave the polling place with election materials to permit a person to vote in the street or from an automobile. The voter must enter the polling place to cast a ballot.

### **Absentee Ballot**

Voters who are away from their county of residence during an election period can vote by absentee ballot, available from your county’s board of elections. You are eligible to vote by absentee ballot if you are:

- Registered to vote in the precinct where you reside
- Outside of the county on election day
- Working in another poll on election day
- **Confined because of illness, injury or disability**
- **Working as the caretaker of an individual confined because of illness, injury or disability**
- 65 years of age or older



- Scheduled to work during the 12 hours the poll is open (6 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- **Have a physical disability or personal illness**
- An election official
- Cannot vote on election day because of religious beliefs
- Will be in jail for a misdemeanor or awaiting trial
- A full-time fire fighter, police officer or provider of emergency medical services

If you are eligible, you may vote in your county clerk's office. The board of elections must receive absentee ballots before the polls close on Election Day. First you must complete an absentee ballot application and return it to your county election board (usually in the county clerk's office) by noon on the day before the election. Then you must vote at your county clerk's office. Absentee voting in the clerk's office begins 29 days before the election and will be available at least two Saturdays before Election Day.

To vote by absentee ballot by mail, you must complete an absentee ballot application and return it to your county election board. Applications from voters must be received at least eight days before Election Day. If you live in Lake or Marion counties, or if you are a confined voter, a personal care assistant, a military voter or an overseas voter, special requirements apply. Please contact your county election board or county clerk for more detailed information.

Your absentee ballot application must include:

- Your name and address
- The election for which you are requesting a ballot
- Your reason for being absent
- Your party choice (if a primary) or that you want to vote an issues-only ballot
- Mailing address to which you want ballot sent
- Your signature

If the application is approved, the county election board mails you an absentee ballot. Your completed ballot should be returned by mail or hand-delivered by you, a member of your household or your attorney. The county election board must receive ballots no later than Election Day for them to be processed in the election.

## **Get Out the Disability Vote**

It's only when people exercise their right to vote that significant change can happen – such as the ADA. To encourage people with disabilities and their families in your area to “get out the vote” and become politically involved, consider the following ideas offered by *Word from Washington*, a newsletter and nonpartisan voting guide developed by the United Cerebral Palsy Association:

- Post notices asking for volunteers to provide respite care for children with disabilities so parents have time to register and vote.
- Organize a team to contact members of your disability community about registering. The team can also provide transportation on election day.
- Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper about the impact of proposed legislation on people with disabilities.
- Survey candidates/legislators on their positions regarding disability-related issues. Mail the results to your local disability community.
- Bring voter registration forms to all your meetings. Set a goal to register one person per day or week. Call your local election board for forms.
- Invite people with disabilities and family members to join a group that advises candidates/legislators on issues important to the disability community.

## **Start a Local Voter Registration Campaign**

You can also conduct a voter registration campaign in your local community. Multiple voter registration forms are available at your local voter registration office or can be ordered by calling the Voter Registration Hotline at **1-800-753-VOTE**. Forms are also available at the license branch, many city and county offices, post offices, public libraries and Army and Navy recruitment offices. Any resident of Indiana can register other people to vote. There is no legal authorization or training necessary to advocate voter registration in your own community. For more information, contact your local voter registration office.

### **Assess a Political Candidate**

In any election year, there are many candidates/legislators to assess for their support of issues central to the lives of children and adults with disabilities and their families. Consider the guidelines the United Cerebral Palsy Association and other advocacy groups use to gauge candidates'/legislators' support and interest in disability issues.

Check to see if candidates/legislators:

- Utilize accessible campaign offices and schedule events at accessible locations.
- Hire sign language interpreters at campaign events.
- Air television advertisements that are open or closed captioned and video described.
- Make campaign literature available in large print and in Braille or on audio tape and computer disk.
- Invite disability community leaders and members to strategy sessions, public forums and town meetings.
- Mention persons with disabilities and are familiar with their issues.
- Strongly support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Have a positive record on ADA implementation.
- Vote in support of the interests of the disability community in education/special education, health care, Medicaid/Medicare, job training, housing, employment, transportation, taxation, technology development, telecommunications access and supplemental security income (SSI/SSDI).

### **Organize a Legislative Forum**

To learn more about candidates' views and beliefs, consider organizing a legislative forum. Invite candidates to an accessible location to explain their platforms and answer questions from the community. For more information, request a copy of the "Special Event – Legislative Forum" packet available from the Indiana Governor's Planning Council for People with Disabilities. To order, call Kim Dennison at (317) 631-6400 (voice) or e-mail [kdennison@bjmpr.com](mailto:kdennison@bjmpr.com).

## **Become a Precinct Officer**

Increase awareness and sensitivity to citizens with disabilities at the polls by becoming a precinct officer or poll worker. You may be able to make the voting process more inviting for other citizens with disabilities. You can indicate your interest in being a precinct officer on your voter registration form or call the county election office or the political party offices in your county. These are paid positions and require arriving at the polling place at least one hour before the polls open and remaining until the polls close.

### *Precinct officer duties*

**Inspector** – Overall, in charge of the precinct; receives election materials from the county election board; sets up the polling place; inspects ballots; tabulates ballots and returns election materials to the county election board.

**Judge** – Judge of opposite political party to the inspector; acts as check and balance to the inspector; assists with inspection of the ballots; oversees deposit of ballots into the ballot boxes; assists in the tabulation of the votes; accompanies precinct inspector when returning election materials.

**Poll clerk** – Verifies the registration status of voters; oversees poll lists or books; assists in vote tabulation; compares voter's signature on poll list with registration signature, if available at polls.

**Sheriff** – Monitors the polling location; assists others in their duties; maintains order at the polls; may leave polls to request assistance from a law enforcement officer if violation of law occurs or appears imminent.

Each precinct election officer is entitled to compensation. All precinct election officers are to be paid a per diem fixed by the county executive (county commissioners). In addition, the inspector may be paid an additional amount for his or her services in picking up election supplies at the circuit court clerks' office. Inspectors and judges may

be paid an additional amount for their duties in returning the precinct election supplies to the clerk's office.

Precinct election officers must arrive at the polling place no later than one hour before the polls open at 6 a.m. to prepare the polling place for Election Day. The polls must remain open continuously from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Once the polls open, no precinct election official may leave the polling place until the canvass of votes has been taken, or, if ballots are not counted in the precinct, until all election supplies and papers have been prepared for return to the county election board.

## **Resources**

### **For more information on registering to vote:**

Contact your county clerk or voter registration board (under “voter registration” in the government section of the white pages of your phone book) or your local office of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

### **For more information on absentee voting:**

Contact your county circuit court clerk or county election board.

### **Indiana Election Division**

Office of the Secretary of State  
302 W. Washington St., Room E204  
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2767  
(317) 232-3939 (voice)  
(800) 622-4941 (voice)  
(317) 233-6793 (fax)  
[www.in.gov/sos/elections](http://www.in.gov/sos/elections)

### **Indiana Governor’s Planning Council for People with Disabilities**

150 West Market St., Suite 628  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
(317) 232-7770 (voice)  
(317) 232-7771 (TT)  
(317) 233-3712 (fax)  
[GPCPD@gpcpd.org](mailto:GPCPD@gpcpd.org) (e-mail)  
[www.state.in.us/gpcpd](http://www.state.in.us/gpcpd)

### **Indiana League of Women Voters**

2346 S. Lynnhurst Dr.  
Indianapolis, IN 46241  
(317) 241-8683 (voice)  
[www.home.earthlink.net/~lwvin/](http://www.home.earthlink.net/~lwvin/)

### **League of Women Voters**

1730 M St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
(202) 429-1965 (voice)  
(202) 429-0854 (fax)  
[www.lwv.org/elect.html](http://www.lwv.org/elect.html)

### **Legislative Process Booklet**

A booklet describing the legislative process, lobbying, advocacy during campaigns and several other governmental issues. Available from the Indiana Governor’s Planning Council for People with Disabilities.

**Paralyzed Veterans of America**

801 18<sup>th</sup> St., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(800) 424-8200 (voice)  
[www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org)

**Voter Registration Office**

Contact your local voter registration office, located in your city-county building, for information on registering to vote.

**Public Advocacy/Lobby Groups**

Membership and/or policy information is free or available to the general public at individual rates (often discounted or free for members with disabilities or families of people with disabilities).

*Indiana Lobbies*

The ARC of Indiana  
22 E. Washington St.  
Suite 210  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
(317) 632-4387 (voice)  
(800) 382-9100 (voice)  
[jdickerson@arcind.org](mailto:jdickerson@arcind.org) (e-mail)  
[www.arcind.org](http://www.arcind.org)

**Citizens Action Coalition of Indiana**

5420 N. College Ave., 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
Indianapolis, IN 46220  
(317) 205-3535 (voice)  
(800) 201-1210 (voice)  
[staff@citact.org](mailto:staff@citact.org) (e-mail)  
[www.citact.org](http://www.citact.org)

**Council of Volunteers and Organizations for Hoosiers with Disabilities (COVOH)**

445 N. Pennsylvania St., #804  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
(317) 262-8632 (voice)  
(800) 262-8630 (voice)  
(317) 232-1150 (TT)  
[covohfdn@iquest.net](mailto:covohfdn@iquest.net) (e-mail)  
[www.members.iquest.net/~covohinc](http://www.members.iquest.net/~covohinc)

Indiana NAMI (Mental Illness)  
P.O. Box 22697  
Indianapolis, IN 46222-0697  
(800) 677-6442 (voice)  
(317) 925-9399 (voice)  
nami-in@nami.org (e-mail)

Mental Health Association of Indiana  
55 Monument Circle, #455  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
(317) 638-3501 (voice)  
mhai@indy.net (e-mail)  
www.a1.com/mhai

United Cerebral Palsy of Indiana  
615 N. Alabama St., #322  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
(317) 632-3561 (voice)  
(800) 723-7620 (voice)  
ucpindy@ucpindy.org (e-mail)

United Senior Action  
1920 W. Morris St., #246  
Indianapolis, IN 46221  
(317) 634-0872 (voice)  
usa@iquest.net (e-mail)

*Federal Lobbies*

The Arc Governmental Affairs Office  
1730 K St., N.W., Suite 1212  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(202) 785-3388 (voice)  
(202) 785-3411 TT  
TheArc@metronet.com (e-mail)  
www.thearc.org

Disability Rights Education Defense Fund (DREDF)  
1629 K St., N.W., Suite 802  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(202) 986-0375 (voice/TT)  
(800) 466-4232 (voice)  
www.dredf.org



Families USA (health care/long term care)  
1334 G St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
(202) 628-3030 (voice)  
info@familiesusa.org (e-mail)  
www.familiesusa.org

Justice for All E-mail Network  
www.jfanow.org

MCARE (Managed Care and Long-Term Supports for Adults with Developmental Disabilities)  
Institute on Disability at University of New Hampshire  
7 Leavitt Lane, Suite 101  
Durham, NH 03824-3522  
(603) 862-4320 (voice)  
MCARE@mcare.net (e-mail)  
www.mcare.net

The National Council on Disability (NCD)  
1331 F St., N.W., Suite 1050  
Washington, D.C. 20004-1107  
(202) 272-2004 (voice)  
(202) 272-2074 (TT)  
mquigley@ncd.gov (e-mail)  
www.ncd.gov

TASH – International Advocacy Association  
29 W. Susquehanna Ave., Suite 210  
Baltimore, MD 21204  
(410) 828-8274 (voice)  
(410) 828-1306 (TT)  
info@tash.org (e-mail)  
www.tash.org

United Cerebral Palsy Association  
Governmental Affairs Office  
1660 C St., N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
(202) 776-0406 (voice)  
(800) 872-5827 (voice)  
(202) 973-7197 (TT)  
national@ucp.org  
www.UCPA.org

## **Trade Organization Lobbies**

Provides access to information on legislative and policy issues to the general public through organization Web sites. Membership is either limited to qualifying organizations or individuals from a specific field.

### *Indiana*

Indiana Association for Home and Hospice Care, Inc.  
8604 Allisonville Road, Suite 260  
Indianapolis, IN 46250  
(317) 844-6630 (voice)  
tstallings@ind-homecare.org  
www.ind-homecare.org

Indiana Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (INARF)  
615 N. Alabama St., Suite 105  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
(317) 634-4957 (voice)  
inarf@inarf.org  
www.inarf.org

### *Federal*

Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities  
1730 K St., N.W., Suite 1212  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(202) 785-3388 (voice)  
info@c-c-d.org  
www.c-c-d.org

National Mental Health Association  
2001 N. Beauregard St., 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
(703) 684-7722 (voice)  
(800) 969-6642 (voice)  
(800) 443-5959 (TT)  
www.nmha.org